

# Spotlighting What Works

Award Winning Community Development Practices

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development • Office of Community Planning and Development

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## What it Takes: Best Practices At Work

*Best Practices is more than honor; it takes commitment to aid communities nationwide.*

**Spotlighting What Works** shares information about the exemplary professional practices of community development practitioners across the country. Each bulletin highlights the best practices of many of the 1997 John J. Gunther Award recipients, as well as issues dealing with HUD's Grants Management System, and other issues facing community practitioners. This issue looks at the Best Practices process and how communities are making the most of using them in their day-to-day work. In sharing with you such examples of innovation and creativity we hope to raise the standard of community development by learning from and building upon the successes of others.

**N**ot long ago Monica Lett, Director of Winston-Salem's Department of Housing and Neighborhood Development, was running one of the best housing and neighborhood development programs in the country in Winston-Salem, NC. But it's quite possible that nobody knew it. More important, they didn't know *how* she was doing it.

The City was running a Consolidated Planning program that got input from neighborhood groups, including special needs populations.

Citizens were becoming more involved through neighborhood associations, and representatives of key local services had started participating in neighborhood meetings. Service delivery was improving, thanks to efforts to increase mutual awareness between service providers and its recipients (See *How Did They Do That?* Page 2).

Furthermore, the City's efforts were responsible for the development of new neighborhood organizations instrumental in reducing drug use and crime, targeting youth for positive recreational programs, and addressing the needs of the growing Hispanic population.

Some time between November 1996 and January 1997, the North Carolina HUD field office, like other field offices, went through a seemingly routine process that landed Winston-Salem five Blue Ribbon Practices in Community Development Awards from HUD and earned them nationwide recognition for their successful programs.

The “routine” process was HUD’s **Annual Comparative Review** (ACR), where field offices critically

analyzed the level at which all grantees were performing to help the field office

### ***How Did They Do That?***

***How did the City of Winston-Salem improve service delivery to their residents? They put their money where their ears are!***

Winston-Salem city officials realized that hearing resident concerns and ideas about the quality, timeliness, and results of community services was the key to making service delivery work. To get their ears closest to the ground the City appointed two full-time Neighborhood Service Officers specifically to work with new and existing neighborhood associations to address their concerns about housing, sanitation, streets, utilities, recreation, and environmental services.

Officers are expected to attend at least two neighborhood association meetings per organization per quarter. There are some 60 neighborhood groups, so this means some long evening hours, for which they receive compensatory time. A key aspect of the Officer’s job is to document neighborhood concerns to ensure that they are addressed in a timely and responsive manner. This fundamental component ensures accountability and helps to increase the comfort and confidence level of neighborhood residents. If the Neighborhood Service Officer is unavailable, a Code Enforcement Officer assigned to that neighborhood attends the meeting. In addition, at least one City staff person is covers each meeting.

The City works with Neighbors for Better Neighborhoods (NBN), a city-wide program initiated and funded through several foundations, city and county governments, and corporations. NBN helps new start-up groups get formally organized, provides or arranges leadership training and helps to initiate the strategic planning process. The City then participates in an ongoing process with these organized neighborhood associations to identify concerns related to neighborhood quality and stability and to access services for neighborhood improvement. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds are used to help sponsor the organization as a public service activity.

A series of collective gatherings with neighborhood association representatives provided a chance for city officials to hear residents, for residents to share success stories, and for both to share resource information. Representatives from key local services participated in all the meetings. This approach has made citizens more aware that they have a voice in the quality of life in their neighborhoods, so the number of associations is growing.

They didn’t leave special needs groups out of the process either. To get special input, City officials participate in the local Council of Services for the Homeless, the Disabilities Partnership and other coordinating bodies. The City sponsors annual public hearings to report on performance, present proposed plans, and solicit additional input.

develop a work plan for allocating travel, financial and staff resources for outreach, technical assistance, and monitoring. They would identify those that were the best at what they did and those who needed some assistance. “Asset management” was the term given to the concept of managing a portfolio of grantees based on assets rather than risks. The concept of managing assets

wasn’t all that new; private companies have been doing it for years.<sup>1</sup> The concept was revolutionary for the public sector, however, which has been much more accustomed to managing risk rather than assets.<sup>2</sup>

This comprehensive review process did something more than help the HUD Field Office develop a work plan. It started HUD’s annual practice of

selecting the best programs, projects, and practices across the country, and using them as learning tools for every other jurisdiction in the country. It started something that would make sure that the best practices of successful communities like Winston- Salem were shared with other jurisdictions to improve community development across the board.

The process started again in November and runs through February 3, 1998.

### **Why Select Best Practices?**

Winston-Salem and others were not just selected for the honor. They were selected because the field office believed they had something to offer communities across the country.

Best Practices are projects or programs, management tools, and techniques that meet at least two of the following characteristics:

- show significant positive impact on those it is intended to serve or manage
- replicability in other areas of the country, region, or local jurisdictions
- partnerships with government agencies, non-profit organizations or private businesses
- creativity in addressing a problem

Best practice awards recognize outstanding grantee performance and ensure that other communities learn their successful techniques and strive to meet the standards they have set.

Best Practices are selected as part of the grants management process so that field offices may systematically use the best performers in their communications, discussions, and consultations to encourage stronger performance and to raise across-the-board performance. In

addition, by widely promoting which communities are doing well, other practitioners can look to best practices for models and advice.

### **The Process**

Like other things in government today, best practices is “bottom-up.” Rather than running a national contest where national level judges may or may not be directly familiar with a program, HUD Field Offices do most of the work when it comes to selecting best practices because they know their communities best.

Best Practices are selected at the same time that field offices conduct their Annual Comparative Review because that phase of HUD’s Grants Management System (GMS) takes the most comprehensive look of the year at the performance of every grantee.

Field offices begin identifying their best practices during other phases of the system, such as the Consultation.

Field offices may look at a jurisdiction’s overall program or a single activity or project, but either way final *assessment, is based on performance and includes analysis of the successful strategies and approaches that led to success.*

Grantees are assessed in eight basic categories, borrowed from the Annual Comparative Review: Consolidated Planning, Decent Housing, Economic Opportunity, Suitable Living Environment, Continuum of Care, IDIS and Reporting, Program Requirements, and Overall Assessment.

Appendix A identifies some universal standards of performance in each of the categories.

For the 1998 round of best practices a group of HUD Field Office

staff developed these standards as a guide for all field offices. Local practitioners participating in several HUD working groups had a chance to review the standards as well. The standards are part of a larger grants management guide.<sup>3</sup>

### **More than an Award: Getting Down to Business**

Being a best practice comes with honor *and* responsibility. Some 1997 best practices communities were asked to make presentations about their practices and programs at technical assistance sessions or to present “posters” at a national Best Practices Symposium in Houston.<sup>4</sup> Others volunteered to participate in working and advisory groups.

For others, the responsibility came less formally, but no less urgently. As news of the best practices spread through fact sheets on the Internet, brochures, news media, telephone, and word of mouth, some communities began receiving requests from all across the country for information, technical assistance, and advice.

Best practices are shared on many levels. Some grantees give technical assistance, others get technical assistance. While some are getting hands-on instruction from their peers, others get ideas to tuck away for future use. Technical assistance can be given over the phone, internet, or it can involve travel to another community, county, State, or region of the country.

### ***Community to Community...***

One of the first things Lett of **Winston-Salem** did upon returning home from the Houston Symposium was to share the award with those who had helped make

the success possible. She set up a “Partners in Progress” Best Practices Award ceremony to recognize the public, private, non-profit, and neighborhood partners who had worked with the City on various aspects of the programs that earned the awards. In addition, they examined other areas not recognized by the national process, such as beautification projects.

Field staff in the South Carolina State Office use **Greenville County** as a model and teacher to new entitlement communities. This year **Spartanburg County**, a new urban entitlement county, benefited from Greenville County’s expertise. Last year, field staff negotiated a similar relationship for **Charleston County**.

**Augusta-Richmond County’s** (Georgia) Antioch Ministries has received inquiries from Florida and Louisiana on its rental rehabilitation program. The greatest impact has been from calls from within the State from other local non-profit entities seeking assistance from Antioch in establishing similar programs in their own neighborhoods. Because of the positive response, the City is considering formally using Antioch as a “mentor” to other start-up faith-based organizations in the City that are interested in developing housing.

### ***...And Across the Country***

Chris Morris, of **Dekalb County**, Georgia’s Office of Community Development, says that her staff consistently receives requests for information about the County’s innovative approach to working with HUD’s Integrated Disbursement and Information System (IDIS). On more than one occasion, a staff person has

traveled to other communities, both locally and across the country, to deliver technical assistance on the program.

Likewise, the Continuum of Care practices of **Chatham County** and **Savannah, Georgia** have reached as far as **Alameda County** and **San Francisco, California**. Staff from each coast met at the 1997 Best Practices Symposium and began sharing information there. Alameda County, already successful in its homeless assistance programs found that they could use the Chatham County/Savannah program as a model to improve their own homeless assistance program.

### ***National Outreach***

The Internet, nationally distributed brochures, and newsletters are used to get the word out about different kinds of programs and projects that are working across the country.

Communities who access HUD's John J. Gunther Blue Ribbon Practices in Community Development Awards website have access to hundreds of ideas, contact names, and successful strategies of community development practitioners. ([www.hud.gov/ptw/menu.html](http://www.hud.gov/ptw/menu.html)).

The companion brochure<sup>5</sup> to the website provides a quick desk reference with brief summaries of programs and contact names of the 1997 Blue Ribbon recipients. Field offices and technical assistance providers use the Blue Ribbon practices brochure to provide examples when they do technical assistance training.

Ben Cook, CPD Director in the **Kentucky State Office**, says he made sure each of his grantees received a copy of the book. CPD Representatives then followed up with a call to each grantee to discuss specific best practices programs

that could assist each grantee. Following the call, the CPD staff downloaded detailed fact sheets that had been posted to the Internet about each program and mailed to each grantee packets of information customized to meet their needs and opportunities.

***Spotlighting What Works***, which has been distributed to all field offices, non-profits, and posted to HUD's website, has proven a useful tool as well for sharing information. As a result of an issue on the **City of Owensboro, Kentucky's** housing rehabilitation program,<sup>6</sup> the City housing and rehabilitation staff received calls from some 20 grantees in the country regarding the details and operation of the City's program. In each case the City sent out a copy of their rehabilitation policies and operating manual. Owensboro staff also spent time on the phone with each of the callers. The calls benefited both grantees, however, as there was information exchanged in both directions.

The demand for peer-to-peer technical assistance is clear. It sheds new light on the concept of sharing best practices. Different forms of information sharing are needed, from printed material to telephone calls to one-on-one in-person meetings, to small group clinics or large-group sessions. Satellite broadcasts and regional or State clinics also fit into the picture.

### **Challenges Ahead**

A challenge for the eight working groups that emerged from the 1997 Symposium, as well as all practitioners everywhere, is to determine the best ways to share best practices to make the best use of staff resources from grantees, HUD, and technical assistance providers.

The groups, made up of community practitioners, HUD field office and HUD headquarters staff, met in Washington, DC in December to work out some of the ways to improve the sharing of information about best practices.

CPD Director Steve Sachs noted “What we’re calling ‘best practices’ is really just one practitioner calling another and asking for help with a problem.” Best practices is intended to expand that pool of practitioners available to offer assistance in a variety of areas. Working group participants agreed that the most effective technical assistance is one-on-one and in small groups, where they can talk about specific problems. As a result of the discussion the 1998 Best Practices Symposium will be structured to allow for maximum one-on-one and small-group interaction.

## References

1. Coopers and Lybrand.  
*Benchmarking: A Tool for Continued Improvement*
2. Blue ribbon practices in community development. *Spotlighting What Works*; May 12, 1997; Volume 1: Issue #18.
3. *Implementing Community Connections: Grants Management*

*Policy Notebook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1998. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development.

4. Excellence abounds at best practices symposium. *Spotlighting What Works*, Volume II Issue #1, August 19, 1997.
5. *John J. Gunther Blue Ribbon Practices in Community Development*. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development. Limited supplies available through Community Connections at 1-800-998-9999.
6. Quality housing rehab means keep it simple, user friendly. *Spotlighting What Works*, Volume II, Issue #2, September 29, 1997.

### Worth Noting...

- The Symposium Planning Committee received proposals to host the 1998 Best Practices Symposium from Milwaukee, WI; Greenbay, WI; Baltimore, MD; Louisville, KY; Buffalo/Erie County, NY; Hartford, CT; Tampa, FL; and Charleston, SC. Selections are underway, and an announcement about the site will be made soon.
- The 1998 Best Practices Symposium will be held June 28-July 2 or July 12-16 depending on the site selected.

### For Further Information...

- For information about Winston-Salem’s award winning programs, contact Monica Lett, PhD, Housing and Neighborhood Development Director, PO Box 2511, Winston-Salem, NC 27102, 910-727-8597.
- *Spotlighting What Works* is published by HUD’s Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of Executive Services. This issue was written by Letha E. Strothers. For more information about Best Practices, contact Ms. Strothers by e-mail at [letha\\_e.\\_strothers@hud.gov](mailto:letha_e._strothers@hud.gov) or by calling her directly at 202-708-1283. Visit our website at <http://www.hud.gov/cpd/spotww.html>.

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## Appendix A

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*The following criteria are characteristics of Best Practices. While the list is not all-inclusive, it does identify some universal standards of performance as they relate to various activities outlined.*

### **Consolidated Planning**

- The Consolidated Plan expresses a community's vision and long-term goals while setting benchmarks for housing and community development activities.
- The Plan is comprehensive in scope, integrated with other local or regional planning efforts, and combines resources to address local needs.
- The Consolidated Plan/Action Plan is clearly written and effectively uses maps and graphics that accurately reflect local approaches for community development. A clearly written executive summary is provided as well.
- The Consolidated Plan is easily understood by the public.
- The Plan is submitted in a timely fashion, communicates a well-thought strategy, and follows HUD/CPD program requirements to attain the community's goals and objectives.
- The Plan shows evidence of coordination, cooperation, and collaboration that reflect outreach efforts, public/private partnerships, and active citizen involvement.

### **Decent Housing**

- Effective delivery of housing assistance with CDBG, HOME, HOPWA, ESG, or homeless grants
- Development of public/private partnerships that leverage available funds while exercising creativity and flexibility in utilizing financing to coordinate their activities and create affordable housing.
- Inclusion of citizens, nonprofit organizations, lending institutions, and

businesses in developing and implementing housing programs.

- Housing programs must be as flexible as possible so they can adapt to ever-changing market conditions and needs.
- Implementation of educational programs to provide homebuyer training and needed assistance on an ongoing basis.
- Effective use of related or leveraged resources, including assistance from other Federal, State, local, and private sources.
- Efficient use of administrative dollars
- Effective utilization of HUD inventory to assist programs.
- Continual refinement and improvement of operations to deliver timely, cost-effective, and high-quality housing for rental or homeownership.

### **Suitable Living Environment**

- Superior performance in implementing non-housing and economic development activities, including infrastructure improvements, public facilities, and public services.
- Consultation with citizens to understand the strengths, needs, and problems of low-to moderate-income communities.
- A holistic Action Plan, including benchmarks, represents the collaborative efforts of neighborhood associations, non-profit organizations, social service providers, developers, businesses, community development agencies, local government entities, and political leaders.
- Public/private partnerships and leveraged resources to achieve overall community and economic development objectives.

### **Economic Opportunity**

- Evidence of a comprehensive strategy that addresses business development, providing a basis for economic investment, job growth, and retention.
- Creation of public/private organizations to leverage resources and effectively link community development or neighborhood revitalization programs with economic development.

- Successful training and/or employment or low- and moderate-income citizens in ventures that reduce employment and stimulate economic enterprise.
- Collaborations by the recipient jurisdictions in regional, metropolitan , and/or State-wide basis.

### **Continuum of Care**

- Superior performance in integrating and coordinating outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing, and comprehensive support services for homeless persons. For HOPWA, efforts may also assist persons who are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Developing and maintaining a computerized network that enables providers to track services to homeless individuals or families.
- A “one-stop-shopping” approach, where all essential data is collected at intake, permitting effective and holistic service delivery.
- Progress toward achieving the goal of mainstreaming homeless persons, with the skills and abilities to achieve self-sufficiency.
- Extensive communication and cooperation with clients and former client’s advocates, non-profit organizations, and faith community, social services agencies, and local governments.
- Leverage of additional public and private resources.

### **Program Requirements**

- Operation of HUD programs in compliance with statutes, regulations, and policies by grantees, sponsors, and subrecipients
- Services are delivered to intended beneficiaries without delay, including meeting benchmarks in program development and operation.
- The grantee’s commitment, disbursement, and production record is outstanding.
- The grantee maintains an excellent financial management system to monitor subrecipient activity. The grantee provides ongoing technical assistance and maintains oversight of activities from start-up to closeout.

- The grantee’s and sponsor’s staff are highly knowledgeable about HUD programs and policies and procedures. They are meticulous in their recordkeeping and conscientious in submitting performance reports that are timely, complete, accurate, and of high quality.
- Highly skilled personnel seek new ways to improve operations and participate in training to increase their knowledge and capacity to serve the community. They are leaders in adopting new practices and policies established by HUD and educate subrecipients about the grants management process.
- In building supportive relationships and leveraging funds, the grantee forms partnerships between the non-profit, private sector, and local government.

### **IDIS and Reporting**

- Unusual commitment to going “Live” on the Integrated Disbursement and Information System (IDIS). This process begins with a willingness to apply new technology to current accounting and reporting systems.
- Consistent training, practice, and application to promote a smooth transition to the system.
- Full use of all learning resources available for information, guidance, and support.
- Enhanced program administration capacity through the use of IDIS, as evidenced by greater efficiency and delivery of real-time performance reports, documenting accomplishments, expenditures, and regulatory compliance for CDBG, HOME, HOPWA, and ESG programs.
- CAPERs that are useful to citizens and utilize HUD software and IDIS to establish short- and long-term strategies.
- Willingness to serve as role models and trainers, providing peer-to-peer technical assistance for grantees in the area or across the country.

### **Overall Assessment**

- Consistently superior performance in several program areas.
- Exhibits administrative excellence in its quest for responsive and innovative approaches to build capacity, increase



performance, and produce positive outcomes.

- Grantee staff is conscientious, complying with statutory and regulatory standards governing HUD programs.
- Limits administrative and rehabilitation oversight costs and maximum amount of funds available for programmatic services to low- and moderate-income persons.
- Adapts organizational structures to address community needs and coordinate.